

Hythe House Support

Hythe House Support Ltd

59 Staplehurst Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2NY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Hythe House Support is an independent fostering agency, registered since 2003. The agency provides permanent, long-term, short-term, and emergency foster care and parent and child placements. The provider offers fostering services for children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and/or mild learning difficulties, and access to therapy and nursery services within the same organisation.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had 15 carer households providing care for 25 children and young people. The manager registered with Ofsted in January 2014.

This inspection was carried out over an extended period due to operational reasons for Ofsted and was not a reflection of any other matters relating to the provider.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 8 to 16 November 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 9 May 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are looked after by foster carers who are caring, reassuring and empathetic. Care is individualised and carers receive a range of training that meets the specific needs of the children they care for. One foster carer received training about depression and children who self-harm. This prepared them well for the child and, as a result, the carer felt confident to meet the child's complex needs. Additionally, the individualised care of a parent and child has led to marked progress and a successful placement.

The quality of the relationships between foster carers and the professionals who care for the children is good. External professionals place a high value on this working together for the benefit of the child. As a result, children experience regular and consistent reviews of the plans for their care and are encouraged to take part in this process.

Foster carers are well prepared and skilled in caring for children. The regular and effective support and supervision that they receive enables them to confidently promote progress for children in all areas of their life. With the support and encouragement of their foster carer, one child has accessed and engaged in education, when they had not done so for several years. Through the dogged determination of another foster carer, another child's education placement was changed to a more suitable provision, where the child has made significant progress both educationally and socially.

Children's views and wishes are well known. There are several ways that these are learned. These include participation activities that create opportunities to talk to staff in a relaxed and enjoyable way, to feedback for carers' reviews, and when children have received a short break with another carer. Supervising social workers ensure that they meet with children when they visit the foster carer and take time to respond to any concerns that the child might have. This helps children to feel engaged and valued.

Foster carers promote children's involvement in their local community as well as in activities that encourage them to keep fit and healthy. Children take part in a range of activities such as dancing, singing, boxing and cricket. Children have positive experiences.

Foster carers work closely with the agency to ensure that children who live some distance from their home continue to have consistent and meaningful time with their family and those who are important to them. Distance does not prevent this and carers go to great lengths to ensure that children do not lose their identity and that their connections to their community are maintained.

Children are well prepared for their futures. Preparation for children moving on to independence is thorough and they are involved at every stage of this process. Several tools are used to monitor a child's readiness for independence, and this means that there is always information about their progress. Positively, there are a few arrangements where a young person has remained with the foster carer beyond the age of 18 and they continue to be part of the family. This arrangement therefore continues to meet the long-term needs of the young person.

The fostering panel, while small, has members who are appropriately skilled and experienced to contribute to recommendations about prospective carers' suitability. Fostering assessments are thorough and there is good analysis throughout. This means that only well-prepared, safe and suitable carers are approved to provide care to children.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Children's needs are well understood by supervising social workers and foster carers. Very clear and detailed risk assessments are in place, which means that from the outset risks are known and where possible are lessened. Supervising social workers update risk assessments as needed to ensure that everyone is aware of how to keep children safe.

Carers have access to out-of-hours support and they feel able to ask for advice or guidance to meet the assessed needs of the child that they are caring for. Carers said that staff are always available to them. This helps them to feel confident in providing care to children whose needs are complex.

The process for matching children to foster carers is thorough. This means that carers have a good understanding of a child's background and anything that might have an impact on how they behave now. Good processes are in place for children who may go missing. The format used for sharing information with external colleagues means that when a child goes missing, critical information about them is readily available and used in locating the child.

Carers receive training in behaviour management and, most recently, regarding de-escalation. This prepares them for caring for children whose behaviours might challenge the care that is given. Carers have put suitable and appropriate boundaries in place, which help children to understand the importance of the choices that they make. Detailed and well-considered plans about caring safely have resulted in children knowing what is expected of them and have helped to keep negative behaviours low.

Staff know what to do and who to inform if they are concerned about a child's welfare. Carers receive a wide range of safeguarding training, either online, as during the COVID-19 restrictions, or face to face, where they can interact directly with each other and the trainer. Children said that they feel safe with their carers. One child said, 'I feel safe where I am living', and went on to say that she knows

that she can go to her foster carer if she is feeling worried or upset. One professional commented on the nurturing environment that a child is living in and the positive impact that this has on her behaviour.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed by an effective registered manager who is ambitious in her vision for children. She has high expectations for what children can achieve and models these expectations to her staff. Leaders and managers ensure that carers receive suitable and appropriate training and were committed to doing this throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. The manager ensured that carers had what they needed to provide children with good care and, as a result, children have made good progress.

Leaders and managers are committed to ensuring that carer training meets the individual needs of the children that they care for. For example, carers have received training in understanding foetal alcohol syndrome, diabetes awareness, recognising and responding to depression in children, and managing self-harming behaviours. This has meant that carers are confident in the care that they provide to children.

Leaders and managers ensure that carers receive regular and consistent supervision, which also helps them to recognise and prioritise the needs of the children. The manager has good oversight of the quality of supervision that a carer receives. She reads every report, raising any issues with the supervising social workers either immediately or in their supervisions. This ensures that issues are not missed and are dealt with straight away.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the progress that children are making. They have developed methods to enable close tracking and monitoring of children's progress. This has led to a strong carer group who are committed to ensuring that children have opportunities to make progress. For example, one child has developed self-care skills, which were previously a significant challenge.

There is good supervision practice in this agency. The culture of an open environment means that there are opportunities to talk and share information. The manager also receives effective supervision from an external professional. Feedback from staff is positive, and they feel valued and listened to. Training is of a good standard and staff said that funding is made available if they wish to attend external courses. Staff meetings are consistent and create additional space for discussion about carers and children. However, the record of these staff meetings does not always reflect the use of child-friendly language.

Leaders and managers have good oversight of the agency, resulting in knowledge and understanding of the agency's strengths and areas for development. They are aware of the need to recruit new and diverse carers who can meet the changing needs of children who require care.

Leaders and managers have good professional relationships. Professionals reported good communication and partnership working with the agency. They said they are happy that they are kept informed, that they receive regular updates and that leaders and managers are available if they need to contact them.

Leaders and managers actively challenge when the responses from other services are not effective. For instance, the manager diligently and tenaciously pushed the local health authority for their carers to be prioritised for the COVID-19 vaccinations. This meant that carers had the option to be vaccinated, therefore creating a safer environment for children. Several carers reported on the manager's strength and commitment to follow this through.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. This is with specific reference to ensuring that minutes of meetings reflect the use of child-friendly language. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC043609

Registered provider: Hythe House Support Ltd

Registered provider address: 59 Staplehurst Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 2NY

Responsible individual: Gary Duffy

Registered manager: Tanya Callaway

Telephone number: 01795 438634

Email address: garyduffy@hythehousesupport.co.uk

Inspectors

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector
Skye Frain, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021